Panch Parmeshwar

Premchand

Illustration : Atanu Roy

Premchand

The real name of the famous Hindi story writer Premchand was Dhanpat Rai. He was born in village Lamhi, near Varanasi. Premchand spent some time in the education department, first as a teacher, and then as a sub-deputy inspector. But after 1920 he devoted his time entirely to Hindi, editing magazines and writing stories.

The social and political changes of his time became the basis of his stories. His stories depict the lifestyle and problems of the villagers. On the one hand, we get a glimpse of their small and big joys and sorrows, while on the other hand, we get a true portrayal of city dwellers struggling with the complexities of life.

This story is based on human relationship, Panch Parmeshwar is one of Premchand's famous stories.

Jumman Sheikh and Algu Chaudhary had been friends since childhood and had complete trust in each other.

They did not eat or drink together. They belonged to different religions. But they shared similar world views, which was the basis of their friendship.

Jumman had an old aunt (khala). She had some property, and Jumman was able coaxed her into transferring it into his name.

Until the gift deed was registered, there was a lot of respect for aunt. Everything changed after the registry. Now Khala (aunt) got to eat only dry bread and hear harsh words.

Aunt tolerated this for a few days. When she couldn't take it anymore, she told Jumman, "Son, give me some money every month. I'll cook and eat separately."

Jumman refused to give her any money. This infuriated his aunt. She threatened to call a Panchayat (council-meeting). Being educated, Jumman commanded a lot of respect. He knew he would surely win. Smiling, he told his aunt, "Sure, go ahead."

For several days old aunt, walking with a stick went from house to house. She went around, requesting everyone to come to the Panchayat. Some waved her off with a nod, while others cursed her instead.

During her wanderings aunt met Algu Chaudhary. She asked Algu to also attend the Panchayat.

Algu said, “I will come but I will not open my mouth. I am Jumman’s old friend. I don’t wish mess-up my relations with him." At this, aunt said, "Son! Will you not speak the truth for fear of trouble?" After aunt left, Algu kept thinking about her words for a long time.

In the evening, the Panchyat (council-meeting) was held under a tree. Aunt told the judges about her plight and demanded justice. She was ready to accept their decision.

Then came the turn to elect a Sarpanch (chief judge). Jumman said, "Aunt can appoint whoever she wishes as the Sarpanch. I will also accept the decision of the Panchayat." Then, Aunt appointed Algu as the Sarpanch.

Jumman was delighted. He was sure to win. But Algu hesitated. Then aunt said, "Son! No one sells his conscience for friendship. The judge is no one's friend or enemy. God resides in the heart of a judge. What comes out of the judge’s mouth are words of God."

Algu Chaudhary became the Sarpanch. Now, Aunt and Jumman were the same to him.

Then Jumman told his story to the judges. “I don't get much rent from my aunt's property. That's why I can’t pay her a monthly allowance. Besides, there wasn't any written agreement of any kind."

After this Algu cross examined Jumman.

In the end Algu announced his verdict. "The property provides enough income to cover Aunt's expenses. If Jumman fails to pay her, then the gift deed shall be cancelled."

Jumman was surprised and stunned after hearing the verdict. “Is this the friendship of Kaliyuga? The one person I trusted most, betrayed me when the occasion arose!”

But everyone else praised Algu's honesty. "This is what a judge is supposed to do - separate the wheat from the chaff."

This judgement made Algu and Jumman bitter enemies. It shook the very foundation of their friendship.

Jumman constantly thought of revenge. Soon, an opportunity arose.

Last year Algu had bought a pair of oxen with long horns from the fair. A month after the Panchayat meeting, one of the bull died. What could he do with a single bull? So Algu sold it to the village merchant, Samjhu Sahu. Sahu bought the bull for one hundred and fifty rupees. He agreed to pay Algu after a month.

Samjhu Sahu used to take jaggery and ghee from the village to the market. From the market he bought oil and salt, to sell in the village. When he got a new bull, he started making three-four trips a day. He treated the poor animal very badly. He neither gave it proper fodder nor water. Finally, one day, the bull fell down after being whipped and never got up again.

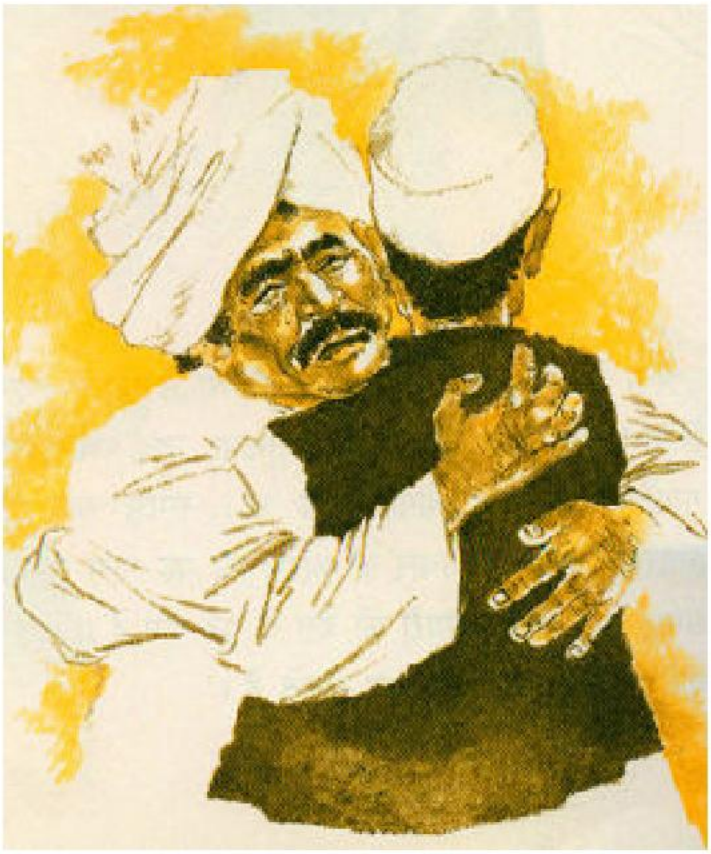
Several months later, Algu went and asked money for the bull. Samjhu Sahu and his wife scolded him severely. “You gave us a near dead bull and now you're asking for its price. Look, we have lost all our lifetime's savings on your bull."

Algu didn't want to lose one hundred and fifty rupees. People asked him to call for a Panchayat. He immediately agreed.

Preparations were made for the Panchayat. On the third evening, the Panchayat met under the same tree. Samjhu Sahu appointed Jumman Sheikh as the Sarpanch. Algu was disappointed, but he kept quiet.

As soon as he became the Sarpanch, Jumman felt a sense of responsibility. He was sitting on the seat of justice and righteousness. It was not the time to seek personal revenge. He should only tell the truth.

The judges questioned both Samjhu Sahu and Algu Chaudhary. Finally, Jumman gave his verdict. "The bull wasn't sick when it was bought. It was due to Samjhu Sahu's negligence and cruelty that it died. Samjhu Sahu must pay Algu Chaudhary the full price for the bull. Algu could reduce the price if he wished."



Algu jumped with joy. He stood up and shouted loudly. He said, “Victory to the Judges.”

Afterwards, Jumman came to Algu. He hugged him and said, “Today I came to know that a judge is no one's friend or enemy. God resides in the judge."

Algu began to cry. The animosity in his heart melted away. And soon the withered vine of friendship between the friends became green again.